

L O N D O N

**TATIANA ANTOSHINA:
THE MUSEUM
OF A WOMAN**

White Space Gallery

18 March - 7 April

IN OSCAR WILDE'S BIZARRE BIBLICAL travesty *Salome* – a play that borrows its somewhat sickly grandeur from the paintings of Gustave Moreau – the lethal dancer of the title is an odd absence at the centre of the stage, all her palpably seductive presence displaced, in Wilde's text, onto the figure of John the Baptist. In a perverse traducing of expectations (a reversal worthy of the photographs of Tatiana Antoshina), it is the saint's body that is erotically anatomised, transformed into a carnal amalgam of dark hair, white skin and full-bloodedly kissable lips. The reversal is both comic and fatal: an erotic delirium punishable, for prophet and princess alike, by death.

Salome may be missing from Antoshina's cross-gendered photographic restagings of selected Old Masters, but you can imagine the devious fun she might have with such a subject. Francesca Piovano's accompanying essay claims these works for a putative 'feminist baroque'; it might be more accurate to say that they invent a feminist decadence.

In his *Decadence of the Nude*, Pierre Klossowski wrote: 'the profaner's gaze upon the female body contained the primitive violence of which the painting is only the simulacrum'. At one level, *The Museum of a Woman*, with its substitution of male nudes for female in photographic replicas of paintings by the likes of Ingres, David and Manet, risks merely rehearsing the contemporary overfamiliarity of such an observation. The straightforward reversal of genders in *Lunch on the Grass* seems, actu-

ally, no more inherently disruptive than the simple statement that the scenography of Manet's original is a matter of the male gaze, the intersection of various misogynist optics, painterly and historical. At the same time, the strategy skirts a certain ahistorical banality, as if the nudes of Ingres' *The Turkish Bath* were the same as that of Manet's *Olympia*, subject to an identical photographic *détournement*.

But the nudes in Antoshina's photographs are more complicatedly seductive than a précis of her method might suggest. The arrangement and iconography of Manet's lunch party may be intact, and the upending of gender roles the first thing you notice, but it's the tangibility of detail that gives the image its novel air of renewed perversity. The male nude in the foreground, and his half-dressed counterpart who advances awkwardly, giddily from the water's edge (is that his hat abandoned in the bushes, or an item of more intimate apparel?), seem to have been happily caught up in some erotic scenario distinctly more kinky than in the original painting, with its merely scandalous nudity. It is not a matter here of simply refracting the lines of sight and power that traverse the painting, but of a playful conspiracy between voyeur and object. In Antoshina's *Olympus*, the prone nude and attendant flower-bearer are both giggling at the whole amateur-theatrical campy of the set-up; the naked man's gold watch is a glinting reminder of the scene's artifice.

It's this sort of comic detail which perturbs *The Museum of a Woman* from the orbit of conventional gender reversal into a more elliptical arc. In *The Turkish Bath*, the belly of the figure in the foreground, with his back to the camera, protrudes with precisely the same happy flabbiness as that of the corresponding woman in

Ingres' painting, while all about him more sculpted bodies pose and preen. Wilde's biographer Richard Ellman was once deluded into reproducing a photograph of a podgy half-nude woman as a genuine snapshot of the author in the role of Salome. Antoshina's meticulously staged photographs cannot help but frame a similar fleshly ambiguity, a sense that the bodies in both photograph and painting are no longer as rigid as they seem. *BD*

DAVID AUSTEN

Anthony Reynolds Gallery

27 February - 27 March

AT LEAST SINCE THE ADVENT OF abstraction, painting has had a weakness for mystery. The pleasure of oily sensuousness, of indeterminate meaning – the pleasure of the aesthetic – seems to swallow up the need for clarity of theme and purpose. It has supported the livelihoods of just as many charlatans as Conceptualism.

The deliberation with which David Austen has rendered the bold schematic motifs that light up his recent pictures, the look of finished completeness he has given their forms and surfaces, might be thought to aid in clarity. His pictures may not be executed with Cy Twombly's flurry of expressionist intensity, but technique is still important to him: Austen's tradition comes out of Jasper Johns; he works with the same attention to the weddedness of motif and technique. Look closely and you'll see that those forms that seem most arbitrary have been erased and realigned. Austen's pentimenti, his faltering steps, do suggest that he has clear steps in mind.

And yet still, at first glance, Austen's hard labour and hesitancy don't seem to have produced cogency or coherence. If you threw your eyes around the first room of

his recent London show you would have seen a single motif dominating each canvas, and each motif different from the next. An empurpled tangle of lines in one canvas sits next to another with a collection of pale blue linear forms like boxed-in bubbles; a rigid constellation of stars shines in the next, and alongside that is a canvas with the word 'DIVER' spelt out in a rainbow colours.

Austen has said that motifs just drop into his head like slides in a magic lantern; those that stay have a certain appealing stickiness, a greater bounty of suggestiveness. Of course that might be private bounty, making his pictures like *romans à clef* in the same manner as the biographical puzzles buried in some of Johns' work. But a number of Austen's canvases seem angled towards a dialogue with traditional notions of composition. One depicts a dazzling patchwork of coloured shapes arranged as if piled from the centre but coloured so they seem entirely flat; it appears to muse on the classical picture space of receding planes. Austen's picture of tubular tangle, *Rose* (2002), might be a skittish interpretation of Pollock's meshes of space. And two pictures of trees, one densely leafed and one bare, seem to approach the very simple dilemma of picturing quantities of detail.

I visited these pictures twice; a third visit might have changed my mind again. They are open enough to allow such changing thoughts and pleasures, and yet sufficiently closed to seem certain of themselves. They are very beguiling indeed. *MF*

BECK'S FUTURES 2004

ICA

26 March - 1 May

I WONDER IF THE MARKETING department at the ICA have seen

B.S. Johnson's polemic to camera *Fat Man on a Beach* (1973). At the beginning Johnson talks about a friend who makes films for South American governments and is instructed, when he runs out of material, to 'cut to bananas'. Johnson's own film then cuts arbitrarily to bananas throughout, illustrating the absurdity of misplaced iconography.

Tonico Lemos Auad's bananas, pin-pricked with a drawing of a face, have been used on the ICA's publicity material to promote not the false pride of politicians, but this year's crop of 'emerging' artists. But, once more, the comedic banana is a red herring. The atmosphere is not one of febrile kookiness; it is a quiet, even contemplative show. The gallery in which Lemos Auad's bananas are shown teeters on muffled psychosis: his sinister rabbits and monkeys, made of carpet fluff and missing heads or feet, exist in the nightmare realm halfway between solidity and apparition, while on the surrounding walls Hayley Tomkins' watercolours, on notebook scraps or directly on the wall, are like neurotic tics – fascinating unfinished actions that appear to have no purpose.

Even the many large, projected videos are, on the whole, pacific pieces. Haluk Akakce's abstract paean to the plant world offers a vertical counterpoint to Ergin Cavusoglu's film of night-time river traffic through the Bosphorous in Istanbul. The slop of the wash and the short wave radio chatter animates the scene beyond the visible, expanding the vista to global movements and universal exchange. Andrew Cross, in his short films made on the US rail network, transposes the notion of waiting and travel into a formal proposition. Mechanical sound becomes musical, direction and speed a vector within a drawing and a tunnel full of smoke a living

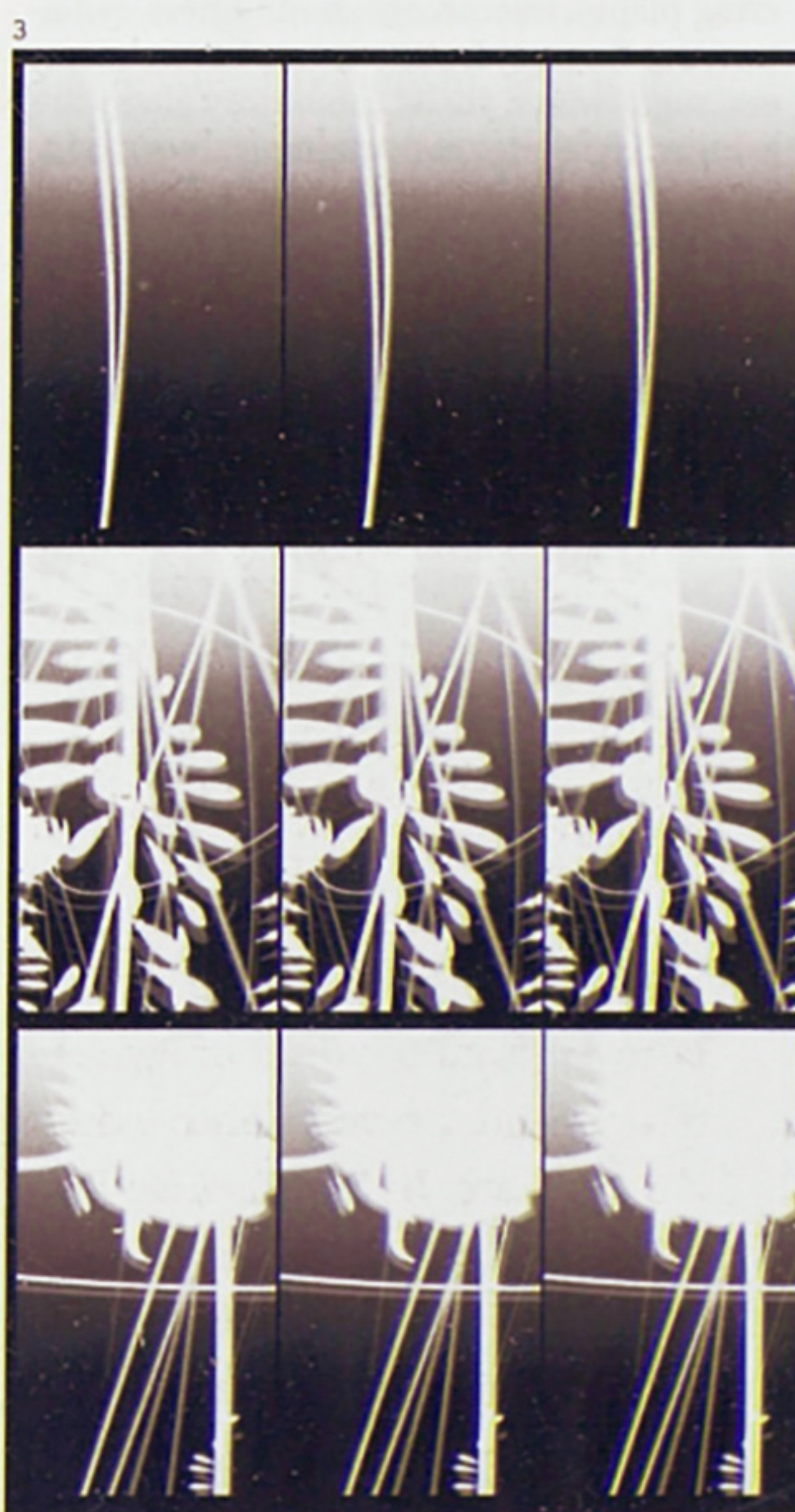
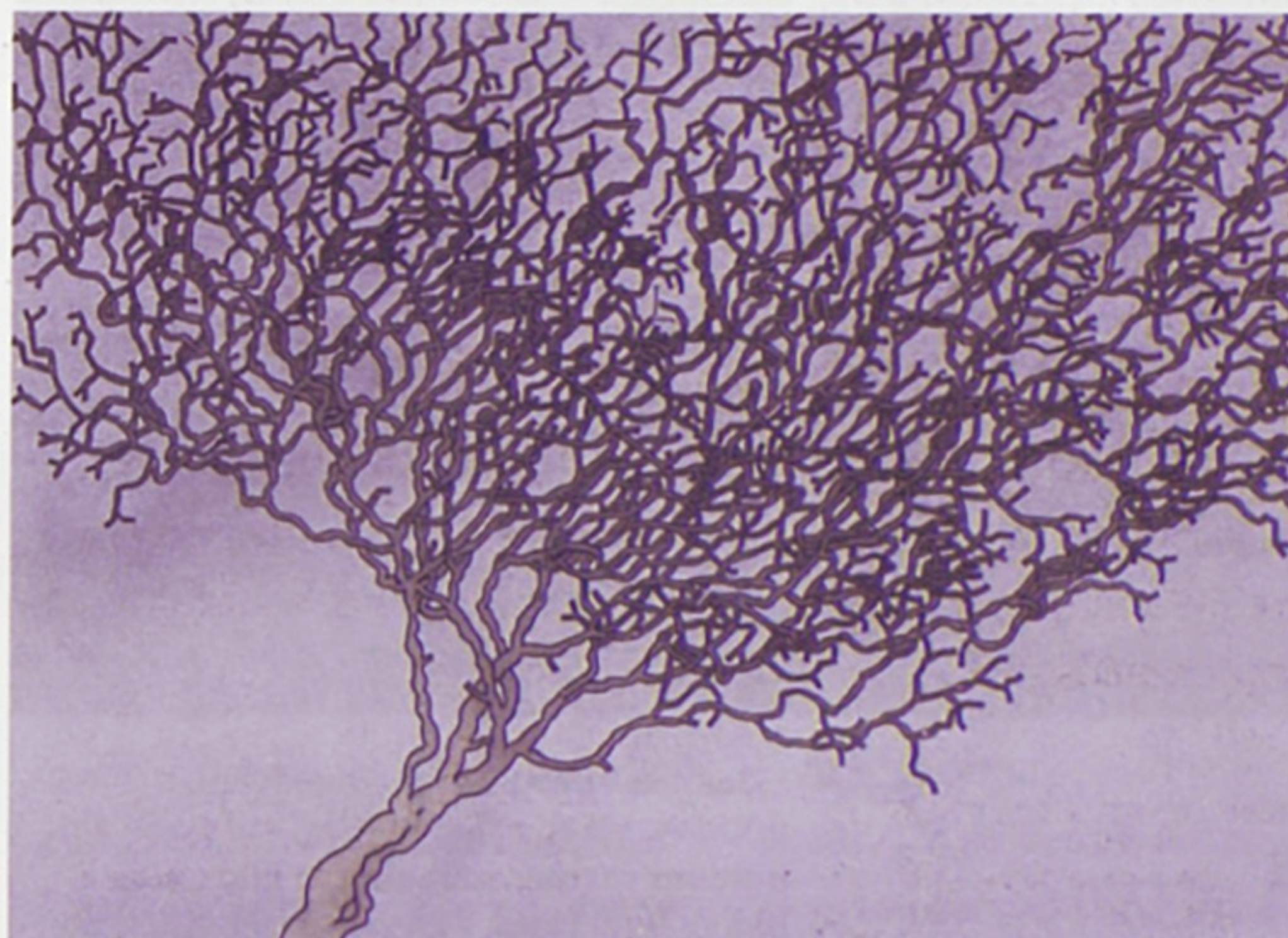
painting with obvious art-historical provenance. Anticipation, a well-wielded video-art tool, is not so infuriating in this instance, as we accept it as a meditative, even literary, aspect of travel.

There are, however, exceptions to this prevailing calm. A hysterical Simon Bedwell has adulterated found posters with rage against the art machine messages: a quaint golfing illustration is labelled 'collector' (the golfer), 'curator' (the caddy) and 'artist' (the golf ball, set up by the caddy and about to be thwacked by the golfer). THE MESSAGE IS LOUD AND CLEAR, but begs the question of why Bedwell, if he wishes to smash the art-world system, is here a cog in one of its driving engines. Nicoline van Harskamp's survey of public and private guards, on the other hand, offers a less tenable manifesto on security and privacy. Her straightforward images of and interviews with people in uniforms seem more statistical and social survey than political pointedness.

Upstairs, the audio installation is a big problem, with Imogen Stidworthy's video of Cilla Black impersonators (the shrillest voices in show business) spilling intermittently over the rest of the work. The Poe-like atmosphere of Saskia Olde Wolber's narrated video – a multi-metamorphic tale of dream-state, hallucination and the supernatural set in a hospital – struggles to maintain its dignity against the din. Out in the stairwell, Susan Phillips's single-finger piano rendition of the theme from Nicholas Roeg's film *Don't Look Now* and video of people strolling past a monument in a park suffers horribly at the hands of Cilla. What might have been a study in serenity and foreboding is transformed into little more than arbitrary footage with unpleasantly loud interruptions. *SOR*



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1. **Tatiana Antoshina**, *Turkish Bath*, 1997, C-print, 124.7 cm x 99.7 cm. Courtesy White Space Gallery

2. **David Austen**, *Blue Tree*, 2003, oil on flax canvas, 152 x 214 cm. Courtesy Anthony Reynolds Gallery, London. © David Austen

3. **Haluk Akakce**, *Illusion of the First Time*, 2002, three-channel DVD projection and sound, duration 6 minutes. Courtesy Deitch Projects, New York/The Approach, London